

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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CHIEF JUSTICE CORRIGAN NAMED TO PEW COMMISSION ON CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

LANSING, MI, May 14, 2003 – Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan has been named to the newly-convened Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Commission's formation was announced on May 7 at an event in Washington, D.C.

Carol Emig, the Commission's Executive Director, said Corrigan was selected because she "is a distinguished jurist with a demonstrated interest in child and family court issues. She is highly regarded by her fellow state chief justices from across the country, and we are honored that she has agreed to serve on the Commission."

The Commission is supported through a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. The Commission is an independent, nonpartisan entity dedicated to developing effective, practical policy recommendations to improve the foster care system.

Corrigan said "I am honored and excited to be part of the Commission's work. This must be a top priority for Michigan's courts and courts across the country: to help place foster children in safe, permanent homes."

The Pew Commission is chaired by Bill Frenzel, a twenty-year veteran of Congress and current Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution. William H. Gray, III, currently President and Chief Executive Officer of The United Negro College Fund, and former House Majority Whip and House Budget Committee Chairman, serves as Vice Chairman.

The Commission includes some of the nation's leading child welfare experts, heads of state and local child welfare agencies, prominent judges, social workers, foster and adoptive parents, former foster care youth, and others. The Commission will convene its first meeting in May 2003. The Commission will issue its final report and recommendations in 2004.

According to the Pew Commission's website, more than half a million children are in foster care across the country. They remain in foster care for an average of three years with an average of three different families and sometimes many more.

Among other issues, the Pew Commission will consider ways to improve court oversight of foster children, Corrigan said.

A nationwide survey of 812 registered voters released by the Commission last week indicated that 53 percent of those polled think that the foster care system overall needs a “complete overhaul” or “quite a few changes and improvements.” Those surveyed in Florida, Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Michigan – which represent about one-quarter of the nation’s population – tended to be more critical of judges and caseworkers, and of the foster care system in general, than other states’ residents. Those six states, pollsters noted, presented “very dramatic cases of where children’s lives have been lost because of breakdowns and failures in the system.”

Corrigan noted that Michigan has a number of children missing from foster care or other court-ordered placements. Expedited dockets, which state circuit courts instituted on the Supreme Court’s order in November 2002, have helped locate 406 missing children as of May 2, Corrigan said.

The death of 15-year-old Heather Kish, who was found killed in Monroe County on October 5 after running away from a court-ordered placement, “is the kind of tragedy that our state judicial branch is working hard to avert,” Corrigan said. “We need to not only find these children, but to understand why they run away from foster care in the first place.”

In cooperation with Family Independence Agency Executive Director Nanette Bowler, Corrigan recently formed a work group to study ways to improve the adoption process in Michigan. (To view that press release, please see <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Press/adoptionworkgroup.pdf>.)

For additional information about the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, please visit the Commission’s website at <http://pewfostercare.org/>.